

Testimony in support of SB 990

Senate Judiciary Committee

September 30, 2014

Chair Jones and members of the committee, my name is Bonnie Charles and I live in South Lyon.

I have been an Animal Rescue Volunteer with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. I have been on numerous deployments with them that have included natural disasters, puppy mills, hoarding, neglect and dogfighting. It is my experience with the victims of dogfighting that I would like to address.

I deployed with the HSUS for a week in August of 2012 to Kalamazoo, Michigan on my first dogfighting case. I assisted in setting up the emergency shelter and walked or carried many of the more than 50 dogs that were seized from two suspected dogfighting operations, and placed them in their kennel where fresh food and water and a soft bed awaited.

I totally support SB 990 in that in our society we are innocent until proven guilty. Dogs that are removed from fighting rings, no matter the size, can be likened to a soldier returning from combat. They must be given time to decompress and adjust to changes. Let me give you an idea of what goes on in the shelter:

The first few days we do as little as possible other than giving fresh food and water and removing waste materials. This is to allow the dogs to adjust to a totally new environment. We then start slowly by providing enrichment, either by sitting inside or outside the kennel reading to the dog. We let them elicit attention. Some dogs can be very fearful and need time to realize that life can be good. They are given quiet time each day when treats are given. Peanut butter-filled "Kongs" (a sturdy dog toy) are the favorite!

Imagine a life where you weren't fed on a regular basis, had no free access to fresh, clean water and the only time you were removed from your heavy chain or pen was to either fight, be trained to fight or forcibly bred. This explains why many of the dogs are fearful of leaving their kennels.

My admiration and love for these dogs grew during this and my subsequent 5 visits to the emergency shelter in Kalamazoo. To watch the transformation in these victims was nothing short of amazing. To see these dogs walk on grass and be able to run in a large enclosure, free of a chain, caused a lump in my throat. I remember one dog in particular. She was a white dog who was blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. She bore the marks of having been hit on her head by a large heavy object. Yet, this dog was perhaps the sweetest dog there. On her first visit to the outside pen, she sat, lifted her face up to the sun, shut her eyes and her mouth lolled open in a goofy dog grin. I am not ashamed to say that I cried.

The dogs are given numerous temperament tests during their stay and I was able to participate in a few. Contrary to popular opinion, most of these dogs go on to be great family pets. Yes, a small number do not pass the temperament tests and are humanely euthanized. The people that perform the tests are skilled and professional, have many years of experience with this matter, and the last thing they would

do is to place a dog that they were uncertain of. This would jeopardize all that we do when we work with these dogs.

These dogs are victims and need to be treated as victims, allowed the time to make adjustments to a normal life and, if unable to, allowed a humane and peaceful death with loving hands holding them as they take their last breath. But, and the important thing to end this is that they **MUST** be given the chance to live the life that cruel inhuman people have stolen from them. Not at the end of a chain, not in the fighting pit, not of wounds after a fight and certainly not because you were finally "rescued" and deemed unfit to live because of the "type" of breed you are or from your history.

Thank you for considering this and for your past efforts on behalf of animals,

Sincerely,

Bonnie Charles  
South Lyon, Michigan